



# Nevada Consumer's Guide to Earthquake Insurance

State of Nevada  
Department of Business and Industry  
**DIVISION OF INSURANCE**

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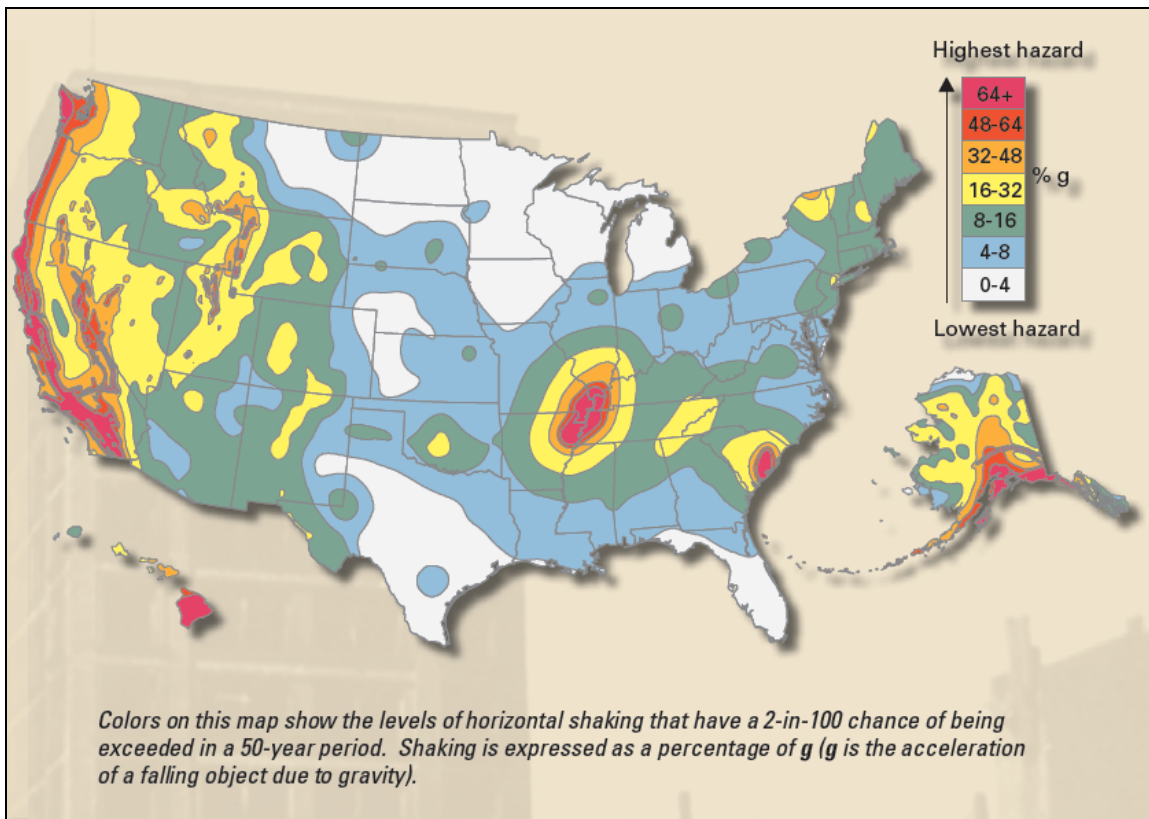
*Cover photographs: 2008 earthquake in City of Wells, Nevada  
Courtesy of the University of Nevada Seismological Laboratory*

# Earthquake Insurance

## Nevada is Earthquake Country

After Alaska and California, Nevada ranks third in the country for major earthquakes – those of magnitude 5.0 or higher. As the following National Seismic Hazard Map from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) shows, earthquake hazard can exist in almost every state. However, Nevada has some of the highest hazard levels.<sup>1</sup>

## 2008 United States National Seismic Hazard Map



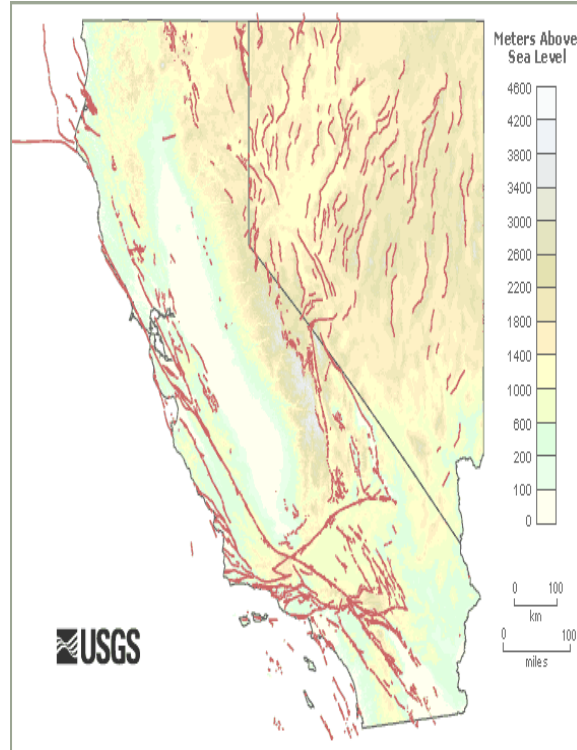
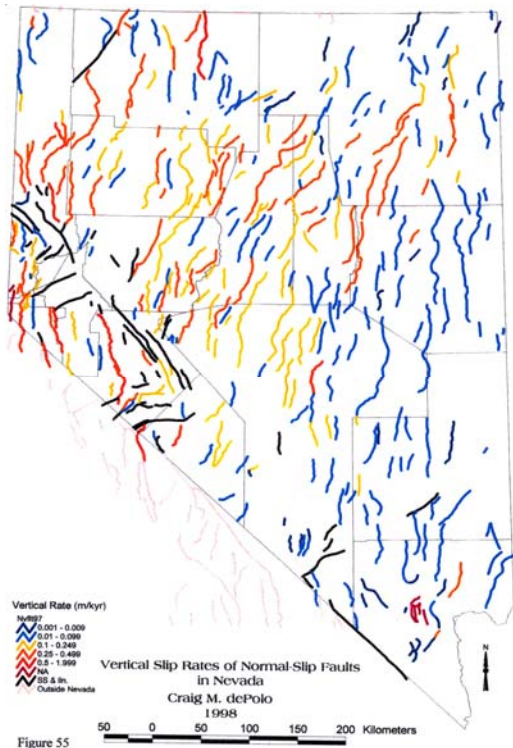
The following maps display various faults that exist in Nevada. The first map<sup>2</sup> shows the slip rates of the faults in Nevada, while the second map<sup>3</sup> presents a comparison of active faults in Nevada and California.

<sup>1</sup> Source: U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 2008-3018, April, 2008. [http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3018/pdf/FS08-3018\\_508.pdf](http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3018/pdf/FS08-3018_508.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Source: Nevada Seismological Laboratory at the University of Nevada in Reno

<sup>3</sup> Source: United States Geological Survey (USGS)





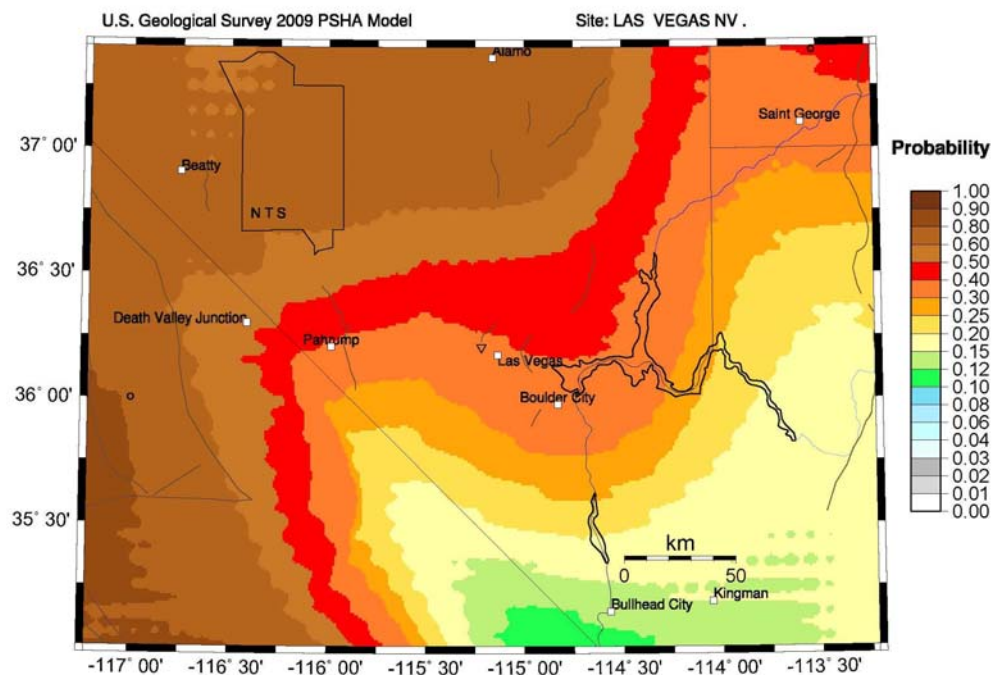
Historical experience and seismic analysis strongly suggest that no area of Nevada is completely safe from earthquakes. United States Geological Survey estimates based upon 2009 data show that within the next 50 years the probability of a magnitude 5.0 or higher earthquake occurring within close vicinity of Las Vegas is 15-40 percent. For the Great Reno-Lake Tahoe area, this probability is 90 -100 percent. This probability decreases as the magnitude of the earthquake is increased.<sup>4</sup>

Still, it is important to remember that probabilities are not certainties, and the next earthquake in Nevada may strike in any place at any time. Wells, which was given a nine percent probability of a major earthquake occurring within the next 50 years experienced a magnitude 6.3 earthquake in 2008.

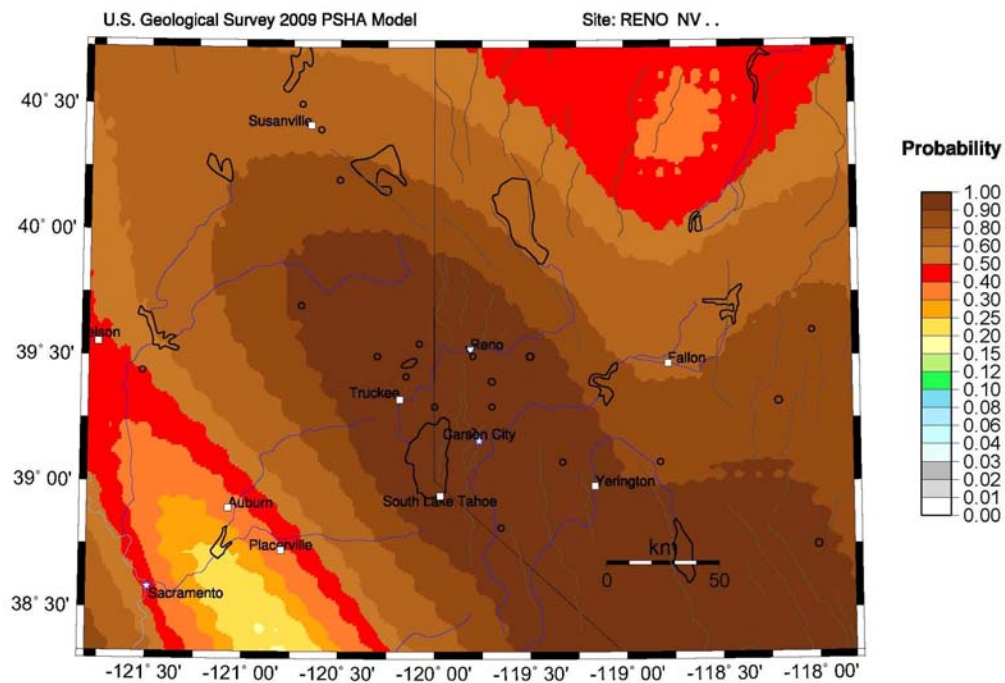
It is essential for all Nevadans to be adequately prepared for a seismic event. The University of Nevada Seismological Laboratory provides a mapping service where you can see the maps of various faults in Nevada and can type in your address to see how close to a fault your home may be. To use this service, go to: [gisweb.unr.edu/OF09\\_9/](http://gisweb.unr.edu/OF09_9/). You can also find out information about the latest earthquake activity in Nevada at: [seismo.unr.edu/Earthquake](http://seismo.unr.edu/Earthquake).

<sup>4</sup> Earthquake risk probability data obtained from United States Geological Survey: <https://geohazards.usgs.gov/eqprob/2009/index.php>

Probability of earthquake with  $M > 5.0$  within 50 years & 50 km



Probability of earthquake with  $M > 5.0$  within 50 years & 50 km



## **Why it's Important to Buy Earthquake Insurance**

Most commercial and homeowner's policies – including condominium, manufactured home, dwelling, and renter's policies **do not** cover damages resulting from earthquakes and earth movement. However, several insurers in Nevada offer earthquake coverage as a special endorsement to an underlying policy at the request of the policyholder. The decision to obtain earthquake insurance for one's property is an individual one and should be based on your understanding and tolerance of the risks associated with not having earthquake coverage.

Earthquakes are an ever-present risk throughout Nevada, and the Division of Insurance encourages Nevadans to consider purchasing earthquake protection.

## **When to Buy Earthquake Insurance**

Purchasing earthquake insurance before an earthquake happens is the best way to ensure that your structure and contents are adequately protected.

If a major earthquake results in significant losses, most insurance companies will declare a moratorium on issuing new earthquake insurance in the market affected by the seismic event. Typically, the duration of the moratorium is anywhere from 30 to 60 days. Such a moratorium often is lifted once the likelihood of damaging aftershocks has diminished.

## **What Earthquake Insurance Will Cover**

Most earthquake insurance policies define an earthquake as "shaking or trembling of the earth, caused by volcanic activity, tectonic processes or any other cause." Typically, an earthquake insurance policy or endorsement provides coverage for any earthquake related damages to the dwelling or personal property under this definition. Some policies also provide coverage for events directly related to earth movement and seismic shocks -- such as landslide, settlement, mudflow and the rising, sinking and contracting of earth if the damage is undeniably attributable to an earthquake. Most earthquake insurance policies treat earthquakes occurring within one 72-hour period as a single seismic event.

An earthquake policy or endorsement will help pay for repairs to your home or business if it is destroyed. Check your home or commercial insurance policy to see if damages caused by earthquake or earth movement are covered or excluded. This information is found in your policy generally in sections titled "Losses Insured" and "Losses Not Insured." If such damages are excluded, contact your insurer or insurance agent and ask about how to obtain earthquake coverage.

## What Earthquake Insurance Will Not Cover

What your earthquake insurance doesn't cover (the exclusions) varies by insurance company. Review your earthquake coverage and declaration page to learn what the exclusions are.

Some of the most common exclusions in earthquake insurance are:

- **Fire.** Earthquake insurance usually won't cover anything your homeowner's insurance policy already covers. It won't, for instance, cover fire damage to your home – even if the fire started because an earthquake ruptured a gas line. Your homeowner's policy would cover losses from a fire.
- **Land.** Typically, earthquake insurance doesn't cover damage to your land, such as sinkholes from erosion or other hidden openings under your land. Earthquake insurance wouldn't pay to fill in large cracks or holes that appear in the middle of your yard after an earthquake. If your insurance includes Engineering Costs coverage, it will pay at least part of the cost to stabilize the land that supports your home.
- **Vehicles.** Earthquake insurance does not cover damage to your vehicles, even if an earthquake damages vehicles in your garage. Your automobile insurance policy may cover that damage. The comprehensive coverage provision of your automobile policy, also listed as the "other than collision" provision in some contracts of insurance, generally provides coverage for damage to vehicles caused by earthquakes, subject to any applicable deductible.
- **Pre-Existing Damage.** Earthquake insurance won't cover damage to your home if that damage was there before the earthquake.
- **External Water Damage.** Earthquake insurance doesn't cover water damage from external sources – such as from sewer or drain backup or flood. For example, if you live near a lake that floods your home after an earthquake, earthquake insurance *won't* pay to repair the damage. A flood insurance policy *will* cover your property for that damage.

### What is a declarations page?

The declarations page is a summary that's usually attached to the front of a policy. Your insurer mails you one each time you renew your policy. It states your name, address, policy number, categories of coverage, coverage limits, endorsement(s), and your lender. You need to have the most current, up-to-date copy to know exactly what your coverages are.

- **Masonry (Brick) Veneer.** Some earthquake insurance doesn't cover masonry veneer -- the brick, rock, or stone that covers your home's outside instead of stucco or siding. If masonry veneer isn't covered, the insurer usually deducts its value from the total cost of your loss before applying the deductible. That means the cost to repair a home damaged in an earthquake would be based on using siding materials that cost less than masonry veneer. If you have any masonry veneer on your home, ask your insurance agent if it would be covered.

## How Much Coverage is Needed

How much coverage is right for you will depend on your situation. Insurance policies have "limits of coverage" that tell you the largest dollar amount covered for different types of losses. Insuring your home for its *appraisal or loan value* likely means you'll only have enough coverage to repay your lender. It may not be enough to repair or rebuild your home, especially if it's a total loss. Usually the dwelling coverage limit will be the same on your homeowner's insurance policy and your earthquake insurance. If you don't have enough homeowner's insurance coverage, you probably won't have enough earthquake insurance either. You should review your dwelling coverage from time to time to be sure it doesn't drop below the cost to replace your home. If it drops below 80% of the full replacement cost of your home, your insurance company may reduce the amount that it will pay on a claim.

**The following are questions that may help you decide how much coverage you need:**

### **For dwelling coverage to repair or rebuild your house:**

How much would it cost to repair or rebuild your home? How much of that cost could you personally pay?

### **For contents coverage:**

How much would it cost to replace your household items (such as furniture, appliances, electronics, and clothing)? Could you afford it? Ask what you need to do to be sure the insurance will cover all of your personal property, especially valuable or breakable items such as art work or porcelain.

### **For additional living expense coverage:**

How much would it cost to find a temporary place to live because you couldn't live in your home after an earthquake? You could be out of your house for many months if there's major damage to your home. This coverage pays the extra costs you have to pay because you aren't able to live in your home. For example, it would pay rent for temporary housing while you continue to pay your home mortgage. This coverage does not pay your regular costs of living, for example, your groceries or your car payment.

## The Cost of Earthquake Insurance

Premiums for earthquake insurance vary by your home's characteristics and the level of deductible you select. Some common characteristics are:

- 1) **Your home's location.** Is your home in an earthquake-prone area? If the area where you live is likely to have earthquake activity, your premiums will be higher.
- 2) **The age of your home.** The premium can be higher for older homes.
- 3) **The construction of your home.** How large is your home and how many stories does it have? Is it a wood frame home or masonry (brick) home? Does it have a masonry (brick) veneer? Does your home have a basement or is it on a concrete slab block foundation?
- 4) **The cost to rebuild your home.** You can choose to insure your home and its contents for either *replacement cost* or *actual cash value*. Replacement cost is the cost to rebuild your home or repair damages using materials of similar kind and quality. Actual cash value is the value of your home considering its age and wear and tear. Actual cash value coverage pays you for your loss, but often doesn't pay enough to fully repair or replace the property.
- 5) **The deductible(s).** As with homeowner's insurance, a larger deductible means you'll be responsible for more of the loss. It also means a lower premium for you.

## Earthquake Deductibles

Earthquake insurance commonly is offered with a high deductible which is in the form of a percentage rather than a dollar value. The deductible may range from five to 25 percent of the structure's policy limit and is higher for locations that are considered a higher than average risk of earthquakes. The insurer is responsible for payment only for damages that exceed the deductible. Not all policies are alike, and the deductible may apply separately to the loss of contents, structure or unattached structures.

Assume that an earthquake totally destroys your home and you have earthquake insurance that covers all the damage from the earthquake. The following table explains by way of example how one type of earthquake deductible may work if there's a loss from an earthquake. Always check with your agent for an explanation of how the deductible may work for your earthquake coverage.



	Dwelling	Outside Structures	Personal Contents	Total Amount
Coverage Limits	\$100,000	\$10,000	\$50,000	\$160,000
Deductible	10%	10%	10%	
Your Property Damage	\$110,000	\$8,500	\$62,000	\$180,500
Deductible Amount (Your Responsibility)	[\$10,000] (\$100,000 x 10%)	[\$1,000] (\$10,000 x 10%)	[\$5,000] (\$50,000 x 10%)	\$16,000
Total Amount Insurer May Pay <i>The greater of: (covered loss – deductible) or policy limits</i>	\$100,000	\$7,500	\$50,000	\$157,500

In the table above, the deductible is 10% for each type of coverage. You would be responsible for the deductible for the dwelling, or \$10,000 in this case. You also would be responsible for the \$1,000 deductible on outside structures and the \$5,000 deductible on personal property.

The earthquake damage to the dwelling and personal property is more than the coverage limit for both of these types of property. For example, there is \$110,000 in damages to the dwelling vs. a \$100,000 coverage limit. But, the damage to outside structures is less (\$8,500) than the \$10,000 coverage limit.

Total reimbursement to you would be based on the difference between your property damage and the deductible, up to the coverage limit. In this example, the insurer would pay \$100,000 (\$110,000-\$10,000) for the dwelling and \$7,500 (\$8,500-\$1,000) for outside structures. In each of these, the net loss was less than or equal to the coverage limit.

The insurer's payment for personal property would be calculated the same way – property damage (\$62,000) minus deductible (\$5,000). Your net loss would be \$57,000. But your policy limit is \$50,000 for personal contents, so the total amount you would be paid for your personal property loss would be capped at the coverage limit, or \$50,000.

In this example, your total loss is \$180,500. You would be responsible for \$16,000 in deductibles **plus** \$7,000 in unreimbursed or non-covered damage to your personal property. The insurer's total payment for this claim would be \$157,500.

When you shop for insurance, you may be asked what deductible you want. Remember that earthquake deductibles are already much larger than a typical homeowner's insurance deductible. If your deductible is too high, you may never

be able to use your earthquake insurance because the damage will never be greater than the deductible.

The deductible you pay is considered an uninsured loss. You're entitled to federal disaster loans to help cover uninsured losses. Remember that you are expected to repay a loan.

Another unique feature of earthquake insurance is time limits. Typically, all earthquake events in a 72 hour (3 day) period are considered one event – with one claim and one set of deductibles. **Damage caused by aftershocks more than 72 hours after the first quake could mean a second claim with a second set of deductibles.** The period of time may not be 72 hours in all policies. Ask your insurance agent.

## What to do to Protect You and Your Home

A homeowner can take steps to lower the risk of earthquake damage. Some of these steps also can mean a lower earthquake insurance premium. Retrofitting (changes to your home to reduce damage) may be an easy and inexpensive way to protect some homes. However, changes to the structure and to some types of homes could be very expensive. A qualified contractor or engineer can advise if retrofitting is practical for your home.

Some inexpensive ways to retrofit your home are:

- Bolt down items such as bookcases, dressers, and televisions. Securing heavy items not only can reduce property damage but also can mean fewer injuries.
- Secure and brace the water heater to the dwelling frame.
- Install automatic gas shut-off valves.

More expensive, structural retrofit measures are:

- Anchor a house to its foundation through seismic bolting.
- Install bracing; one approach is to cover cripple walls (in the space between the foundation and the floor where the crawl space is) with plywood.

The University of Nevada Seismological Laboratory is an excellent resource for how to prepare your home, family and workplace for a seismic event. The website also provides information on earthquakes in Nevada and the lessons learned from past earthquakes. You can access this information at [seismo.unr.edu/Preparedness](http://seismo.unr.edu/Preparedness)

The website for Earthquake Country Alliance, based in California, gives specific instructions to secure furniture and other items in your home to prevent injuries and damages at [daretoprepare.org/secure\\_your\\_stuff.html](http://daretoprepare.org/secure_your_stuff.html).

You'll find advice from the United States Geological Survey on preparing for an earthquake and what to do during and after one at [earthquake.usgs.gov/prepare/](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/prepare/).

Another source on how to prepare for earthquakes is the Institute for Building and Home Safety's website: [disastersafety.org](https://disastersafety.org) (Click on "Get Prepared", then "Earthquakes").

Emergency experts advise you to always have basic supplies (such as water, food, and flashlights) on hand in case there's an emergency. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) [fema.org](https://fema.org) and your state or local emergency services offices have more information on preparing for an emergency.

## **After an Earthquake**

If your home, apartment or business has suffered damage from an earthquake,

- Find a radio, television, or Internet connection to learn about emergency instructions from your local officials.
- You should expect aftershocks, which can cause more damage in the hours, days, weeks or even months after the quake.
- Check utility lines and appliances for damage. If you smell gas, open windows and turn off the main gas valve. If your home's electric power goes on and off, turn off your home's main circuit breaker to prevent power surges.
- Check chimneys for cracks or other damage before making a fire.
- If your home has been damaged, do whatever you need to prevent more damage or property loss. This could include boarding up windows to prevent theft.
- Call your agent or insurance company. Ask about your coverage for earthquake damage and what to expect next. Most importantly, ask when and how a claims adjuster will contact you. Even if you do not have earthquake insurance, file a claim with your homeowner's or commercial insurance company or agent right away. Additional living expenses or certain damages from fire and water may be covered under the standard homeowner's or commercial insurance policies.
- Keep notes about your contacts with the insurer, your agent and any other insurance company representative about your claim. Include dates, times and names. Keep copies of correspondence.
- Check your own documents to find your policy and declarations page. Both will tell you more about your coverage.
- Find your household inventory.

If an affected area is declared a federal major disaster, consumers may need written documentation of claim denials to receive certain kinds of assistance from state and federal agencies. However, in the event a claim that was originally

denied is changed to an accepted claim at a later date, homeowners or business-owners are generally required to reimburse the financial assistance or funding received from FEMA not to exceed their claim settlement.

## Useful Tips

An insurance policy is a legal contract. Read your policy and, if you have questions, contact your insurance agent or company. If you still have questions, contact the Nevada Division of Insurance.

When you buy earthquake insurance, you'll receive a policy. If you do not receive a policy within 30 days, contact the insurance company. If you need a company's toll-free number, check its website, call your agent or contact the Nevada Division of Insurance.

Keep your policy in your home files. Know the name of your insurer.

### Helpful Hint

Enter your insurance agent's phone number or your insurer's toll-free phone number into your cell phone's memory.

- Before any disaster occurs, make sure to prepare a detailed inventory of your property. Take pictures and make video recordings where possible and try to save receipts of major items for documentation purposes. Having thorough written and visual records of your property in its pre-loss condition is likely to make it easier to demonstrate to your insurance company the nature and extent of the damage.
  - Go through each room; write down and take pictures or videos of everything in the room. Don't forget valuable items such as antiques, electronics, jewelry, collectibles, and guns.
  - Store your home inventory in a secure place at another location, such as your workplace, a safe deposit box, a relative's house, or online. Keep a copy at home.
  - Review and update your home inventory, including your pictures and videos each year. Update your inventory when you buy new items and make repairs. Keep receipts with your home inventory.
- If your property has been damaged as a result of an earthquake, do whatever is necessary to prevent further damage, including boarding up your home to prevent looting.
- Obtain estimates covering repairs to structural damage. Prepare an inventory of damaged personal items. Include a description of each item and its value. Attach bills, receipts and other documentation that substantiates your figures. In addition, keep careful records of any additional living expenses you incur if you have to find other accommodations while your house is being repaired.



- Once your insurance company has determined that your loss was covered, it probably will assign an adjuster to verify your claim and determine the amount of the loss. Most claims are settled promptly, but some may require investigation, often because of the extent of the loss or because the cause of loss is unclear.
- As with all types of insurance, the best advice is to understand your policy and be sure you have the proper coverage before an accident or disaster occurs. If you need help understanding what your policy covers, contact the Division of Insurance Consumer Services Section at (775) 687-0700 in Carson City or at (702) 486-4009 in Las Vegas or toll free at (888) 872-3234.
- If you are unable to find earthquake insurance due to risk characteristics in the voluntary insurance market, you may contact a licensed surplus lines broker for placement within the non-admitted market. Licensed surplus lines brokers also have access to natural disaster policies including earthquake coverage. A list of licensed surplus lines brokers is available through the Nevada Surplus Lines Association:  
**Nevada Surplus Lines Association**  
[nsla.org](http://nsla.org)  
 (775) 826-7898  
 (888) 334-4577

## Quick Links

- Nevada Division of Insurance: [doi.nv.gov](http://doi.nv.gov)
- Nevada Earthquake Safety Council: [unr.edu/earthquake/index.html](http://unr.edu/earthquake/index.html)
- FEMA Earthquake Information Page: [fema.gov/hazard/earthquake/index.shtm](http://fema.gov/hazard/earthquake/index.shtm)
- National Association of Insurance Commissioner's Insure U consumer education website: [InsureUonline.org](http://InsureUonline.org)

## Where to Buy Earthquake Insurance

The companies provided in the list below are admitted carriers that wrote at least \$10,000 of earthquake insurance premiums in 2010. They are licensed by the Commissioner of Insurance and are subject to the Division's regulatory oversight. Contact information for these companies is available on the Division's Web site, [doi.nv.gov](http://doi.nv.gov), click on the License Look-up Tool and enter the company name.

ACA Insurance Company	Insurance Company Of The West
Allianz Global Risks US Insurance Company	Ironshore Specialty Insurance Company
Allied Property & Casualty Insurance Company	Lexington Insurance Company
Allied World Assurance Company US Inc	Liberty Insurance Companyrp
Alterra Excess & Surplus Insurance Company	Liberty Mutual Fire Insurance Company
Amco Insurance Company	Maiden Specialty Insurance Company
American Economy Insurance Company	Maryland Casualty Company
American Family Mutual Insurance Company	Maxum Indemnity Company
American Guaranty & Liability Insurance	Metropolitan Property & Casualty Insurance Company
American Insurance Company	Mt Hawley Insurance Company
American National Property & Casualty Company	National Surety Corp
Amica Mutual Insurance Company	National Union Fire Insurance Company Of Pittsburgh
Arch Insurance Company	Nationwide Insurance Company Of America
Arch Speciality Insurance Company	Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company
Automobile Insurance Company Of Hartford CT	Nevada Capital Insurance Company
Axis Insurance Company	Oregon Mutual Insurance Company
Axis Surplus Insurance Company	Pacific Specialty Insurance Company
Beazley Insurance Company Inc	Princeton Excess & Surplus Lines Insurance
Century National Insurance Company	Property & Casualty Insurance Company Of Hartford
Chartis Property Casualty Company	Safeco Insurance Company Of America
Colorado Casualty Insurance Company	Sentinel Insurance Company Ltd
Continental Casualty Company	Sequoia Insurance Company
Employers Fire Insurance Company	Standard Fire Insurance Company
Endurance Amer Specialty Insurance Company	State Farm Fire & Casualty Company
Essex Insurance Company	Steadfast Insurance Company
Farmers Insurance Exchange	Torus Specialty Insurance Company
Federal Insurance Company	Travelers Excess & Surplus Lines Company
Federated Service Insurance Company	Travelers Home & Marine Insurance Company
Fidelity & Deposit Company Of Maryland	Travelers Indemnity Company
Fire Insurance Exchange	Travelers Property Casualty Company Of America
Firemans Fund Insurance Company	Twin City Fire Insurance Company
Garrison Property & Casualty Insurance Company	United Service Automobile Association
Golden Bear Insurance Company	USAA Casualty Insurance Company
Harco National Insurance Company	USAA General Indemnity Company
Hartford Casualty Insurance Company	Vigilant Insurance Company
Hartford Underwriters Insurance Company	Westchester Fire Insurance Company
Horace Mann Insurance Company	Westchester Surplus Lines Insurance Company
Horace Mann Property & Casualty Insurance Company	Western Mutual Ins Co (DBA) Westport Insurance Corp
Houston Casualty Company	XI Insurance America Inc
Illinois Union Insurance Company	Zurich American Insurance Company

## Contact Information

As the ultimate consumer protection agency on insurance issues, the Nevada Division of Insurance exists to serve you. We can be a source of unbiased information and assistance to you.

While most insurers have policyholder service officers to handle your policy related questions, consumers interested in further information on earthquake insurance coverage or who need help understanding what their insurance policy covers are encouraged to contact the Division of Insurance:

### Northern Nevada

State of Nevada  
Department of Business & Industry  
Division of Insurance  
1818 E. College Parkway, Suite 103  
Carson City, Nevada 89706  
(775) 687-0700  
E-mail: [csc@doi.state.nv.us](mailto:csc@doi.state.nv.us)

### Southern Nevada

State of Nevada  
Department of Business & Industry  
Division of Insurance  
2501 East Sahara Ave., Room 302  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89104  
(702) 486-4009  
E-mail: [cnsmsv@doi.state.nv.us](mailto:cnsmsv@doi.state.nv.us)

Toll Free: (888) 872-3234

**Division of Insurance on the Web:** [doi.nv.gov](http://doi.nv.gov)